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Item 4 (g) of the provisional agenda*
Economic statistics: Round Table on Business Survey Frames

Report of the Round Table on Business Survey Frames

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-fourth session,** the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Round Table on Business Survey Frames. The Commission is requested to review the work undertaken by the Round Table.

* E/CN.3/2004/1.

** See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2003, Supplement No. 4* (E/2003/24), chap. I.A.

03-64624 (E) 301203

Report of the Round Table on Business Survey Frames

Purpose

To provide a forum for the exchange of views and experience and the conduct of joint experiments related to the development, maintenance and use of sampling frames for business surveys (business registers). The Round Table is an informal body and participation is on a voluntary basis. Participants, however, are required to contribute to the programme of the annual meeting. Although its mandate does not emanate from a formal body, the Round Table could, on the basis of its discussions and/or experiments, make recommendations to a formal body (e.g., the Statistical Commission) regarding the consideration and/or adoption of certain practices or standards.

Year organized

1986 (Ottawa).

Participating statistical agencies (2003 meeting)

Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Czech Republic, Denmark, Statistical Office of the European Communities, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Economic Commission for Europe, United Kingdom, United States.

Meetings (held annually)

First meeting: Ottawa, May 1986.

Most recent meeting: Rome 26-31 October 2003.

Topics discussed at the Rome meeting:

- Business register profile issues
- Administrative and statistical units
- Business register system enhancements
- Globalization and the proposed multinational enterprises project
- Business register quality indicators
- Improving business register coverage and business demography
- Business register dissemination issues

Products

The host agency updates an Internet site with the most recent documentation after each meeting. Papers from the Rome meeting are available at http://petra1.istat.it/17roundtable. Documents from previous meetings and links to still existing web sites are available at http://forum.europa.eu.int/irc/dsis/businessurvey/info/data/links.htm.

Planned activities

Next meeting: Beijing, October 2004.

Point of contact

François Maranda
Director General, Classification Systems Branch
Statistics Canada
Jean Talon Building 13 B-7
Ottawa, Canada, K1A 0T6
Tel.: (613) 951-7081
Fax: (613) 951-0411
E-mail: maranda@statcan.ca

Contact for information on the next meeting, to be held in Beijing in October 2004

Kuankuan Yang
Statistics China
E-mail: hxs919@163.com

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Economic statistics: Delhi Group on Informal Sector Statistics

Report of the Delhi Group on Informal Sector Statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-fourth session,** the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Delhi Group on Informal Sector Statistics. The Commission is requested to review the update on the work of the Group and comment on the proposed future plans.

* E/CN.3/2004/1.

** See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2003, Supplement No. 4* (E/2003/24), chap. I.A.

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Report of the Delhi Group on Informal Sector Statistics

Purpose

Set up as an international forum to exchange experience in the measurement of the informal sector, document data-collection practices, including definitions and survey methodologies followed by member countries, and recommend measures for improving the quality and comparability of informal sector statistics.

Year organized

1997.

Participants

Experts from the statistical offices of: Armenia, Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Ethiopia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria, Philippines, Poland, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Turkey, Venezuela and Zambia; international bodies, such as: Asian Development Bank, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, International Labour Organization (ILO), Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific and United Nations Statistics Division; and other institutions such as: French Scientific Research Institute for Development and Cooperation, Gujarat Institute for Development Research, Harvard Institute for International Development, National Council for Applied Economic Research, Self-Employed Women's Association, Socio-Economic Research Centre and Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing.

Meetings

First meeting: New Delhi, 20-22 May 1997.

Second meeting: Ankara, 28-30 April 1998.

Third meeting: New Delhi, 17-19 May 1999.

Fourth meeting: Geneva, 28-30 August 2000.

Fifth meeting: New Delhi, 19-21 September 2001.

Sixth meeting: Rio de Janeiro, 16-18 September 2002.

Topics considered

First meeting

The meeting was primarily focused on evolving the terms of reference of the Delhi Group and presenting papers on country experience in the collection and publication of informal sector statistics. The importance of the informal sector for the economies of developing countries and developments in its measurement were also discussed by different international organizations.

Second meeting

The current status of informal sector statistics, limitations of comparability, country profiles etc. were discussed. A number of technical issues, such as

definitional issues, classification and operational problems, survey approaches and sampling designs, including mixed household and enterprise survey etc. were discussed in detail. In addition, the contribution of informal sector in terms of employment, value added, capital formation etc. in the economy of participating countries was also discussed.

Third meeting

The meeting was structured to focus discussions on the following specific technical issues:

(a) Operationalization of the Fifteenth International Conference of Labour Statisticians/System of National Accounts, 1993 international definition of the informal sector;

(b) Strategies to address the issues relating to sampling frame and weighting in informal sector surveys;

(c) Methodologies for obtaining accurate measures of value added for the informal sector.

The meeting recognized that the national definitions of informal sector could not be fully harmonized since the informal sector manifested itself in different ways in different countries. However, it was recommended to use the criteria of legal organization, type of account and product destination in the definition and identification of informal sector units.

Fourth meeting

The meeting consisted of three technical sessions devoted to:

(a) Presentation of results of informal sector surveys conducted by different countries in relation to the action taken and limitations of different survey methods and sampling designs;

(b) Methodology for developing more accurate measures of value added and estimation of the contribution of the informal sector to gross domestic product;

(c) Alternative structure of the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities, Revision 3, for the informal sector.

Fifth meeting

The technical issues were structured along the following topics:

(a) Application of informal sector definition: treatment of persons at the borderline between own-account workers and employees;

(b) Development of criteria for the identification of persons in informal (or precarious, non-standard etc.) employment inside and outside the informal sector;

(c) Sampling frames and designs for mixed household and enterprise surveys;

(d) Evaluation of informal sector survey data and measures for quality improvement;

(e) Country experience.

Sixth meeting

The sixth meeting considered the following issues:

(a) Operationalization of the concept of "informal employment" as distinct from "informal sector employment";

(b) Linkages of informal sector statistics with income and expenditure and poverty statistics;

(c) Establishment of comparable data sets on informal sector;

(d) Methods and procedures for the collection of informal sector statistics on a regular basis, including the preparation of a manual.

Products

Reports of the first through sixth meetings.

Planned activities

The Group will work on the recommendations of its sixth meeting, which was held in Rio de Janeiro from 16 to 18 September 2002. The recommendations of the sixth meeting are as follows:

(a) The Group recognized the need for consolidating country experience and recommended further research for evolving a statistical definition of informal employment and methods of compiling informal employment statistics through labour force surveys;

(b) It was recommended that the countries undertaking combined labour force and expenditure surveys conduct further research to evolve methodologies for linking poverty estimates and informal sector employment;

(c) The Group recommended a joint meeting of the Rio Group on Poverty Statistics and the Delhi Group for addressing the issues relating to the linkage between informal sector and poverty;

(d) Countries need to be encouraged to develop comparable data sets on the informal sector and properly archive them for use by all interested agencies;

(e) Countries undertaking income and expenditure surveys need to be encouraged to identify methods for measurement of the informal economy through such surveys;

(f) It is recommended that the ILO complete a methodological manual on informal sector surveys and present the draft for discussion to the Delhi Group if possible during its 2004 meeting;

(g) To ensure participation of more countries in the Delhi Group, the Chair and members of the Group should approach donor agencies to obtain funding for its meetings, including funds for interpretation;

(h) Future work of the Delhi Group needs to be enlarged to develop methodologies for addressing such policy issues as poverty while continuing to focus on developing high-quality informal sector statistics. The necessary base papers for the next meeting need to be prepared in advance and circulated for the countries to prepare research papers;

(i) Countries should be encouraged (e.g., through financial support provided by donor agencies) to undertake an evaluation of the quality of their informal sector statistics and present the results of such studies at upcoming meetings of the Delhi Group.

Future programme

The next meeting of the Delhi Group has been scheduled for 2 to 4 February 2004, the venue of the meeting has not yet been decided. The tentative agenda of discussion includes:

(a) Defining informal employment and methodologies for its measurement;

(b) Improving the quality of informal sector statistics — country experience;

(c) Measurement of informal economy through income and expenditure surveys.

Apart from the above, the ILO is developing a methodological manual on informal sector statistics and the draft is likely to be discussed at the forthcoming meeting.

Point of contact

Secretary
Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation
Sardar Patel Bhawan, Sansad Marg
New Delhi 110 001
India
Tel.: (91-11) 373-2150
Fax: (91-11) 334-4689/334-2384
E-mail: mpudos@bol.net.in
Web site: http://www.mospi.nic.in/

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Item 5 of the provisional agenda*
Natural resources and environment statistics

Report of the London Group on Environmental Accounting

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-fourth session,** the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the London Group on Environmental Accounting. The Commission is requested to review the work programme, proposed future plans and organization of the London Group.

* E/CN.3/2004/1.

** See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2003, Supplement No. 4* (E/2003/24), chap. I.A.

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Report of the London Group on Environmental Accounting

I. Introduction

1. In 1993, the United Nations Statistics Division issued *Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting* (SEEA) as an interim handbook. In 1997, the Statistical Commission requested the London Group on Environmental Accounting to undertake a revision of SEEA. In 2003, the United Nations, the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank issued, on the recommendation of the Statistical Commission, the final draft of *Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting 2003* (SEEA-2003) on the Internet (http://unstats.un.org/unsd/environment/seea2003.htm) and as a "white cover publication". SEEA-2003 is currently being officially edited and a glossary and an index are being finalized.

2. Until 1997, the London Group served primarily as a forum for exchange of information on country experience in the compilation of SEEA. After a mandate was given to the London Group by the Statistical Commission to undertake a revision of SEEA, its meetings were fully devoted to the discussion of the draft chapters of SEEA-2003. At the conclusion of the final meeting on SEEA revision in Voorburg, the Netherlands, in 2001, it was recognized that despite the considerable progress in the area of environmental accounting presented in the revised SEEA, much methodological and practical work remained to be done. The London Group agreed that sharing country experience would continue to be a valuable way to advance theory and practice of environmental accounting. It also agreed that the Group should devote a significant portion of its efforts to advancing the theory and practice of environmental accounting. As a result of those considerations, the most recent meeting of the London Group, which was hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Rome (5-7 November 2003), was a combination of exchange of country experience and discussion of handbooks on best practices. Two handbooks, one on fishery resource accounting and another on water accounting, were presented. The handbook on fishery resource accounting will be submitted for publication by the United Nations, FAO and the United Nations University by the end of 2003.

3. The London Group spent much time in Rome discussing the lessons learned from the SEEA revision process and the future of the London Group. The present report reflects the conclusions of the meeting in two main areas: the London Group's future work plan and its organization.

II. Future work of the London Group

4. The London Group will continue the work it began during the SEEA revision to provide leadership in defining international best practices in the theory and practice of environmental satellite accounting within the framework of the System of National Accounts. It will also continue to provide a forum for the sharing of national and international expertise and experience in this field. In order to achieve the above objectives, the Group has agreed to work in three strategic directions:

(a) Consolidate work in those areas that are already advanced through the preparation of handbooks providing methodological and practical guidelines on the implementation of selected components of SEEA-2003 (e.g., water and mineral resources accounting);

(b) Continue theoretical and practical development of components of environmental accounting that are not yet well advanced. This will be accomplished through ongoing discussion of specific issues selected by the London Group at its meetings. Discussions will take place between meetings and will involve those participants with the strongest interest and/or experience relating to the issue at hand;

(c) Assist in promoting the implementation of SEEA-2003 in countries and the use of environmental accounts to inform policy debates at the national and international levels.

5. As a mode of operation to meet the first and second strategic directions above, the London Group has agreed to create working groups on selected topics. Four such groups were identified in Rome, one on water accounting (to be moderated by the United Nations Statistics Division), another on energy and mineral resource accounting (to be moderated by Statistics Denmark), a third on policy uses of environmental accounts (to be moderated by Statistics Sweden and the European Environment Agency) and a fourth on means of introducing social dimensions into environmental accounts as a basis for contributing to sustainability assessment (to be moderated by Statistics Sweden). Electronic discussion groups on those topics will be established; the precise scope and objectives for their work will be determined by their members, but some of their objectives were discussed in Rome, as described below.

6. The working group on water accounting will:

(a) Review and provide input on the draft handbook on *Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting for Water Resources*;

(b) Contribute to the electronic discussion group on terms and definitions related to water accounting established by the United Nations Statistics Division and Division for Sustainable Development with a view to harmonizing the definitions and classifications used in international questionnaires with the accounting framework;

(c) Prepare an issue paper on the expansion of the water accounting framework to social aspects;

(d) Contribute to the discussion on water indicators that will be a topic in the next *World Water Development Report*.

7. The working group on energy and mineral resource accounting will:

(a) Carry out a survey on country practices in the compilation of mineral resources accounting;

(b) Prepare guidelines on the compilation of subsoil asset accounts;

(c) Consider the discussions of the Canberra II Group on the Measurement of Non-Financial Assets as they relate to subsoil assets.

8. The working group on policy uses of environment-economic accounts will:

(a) Identify policy needs in relation to environmental accounting;

(b) Identify means to communicate with the user community so as to promote the usefulness of environmental accounts in the policy process;

(c) Identify current applications of environmental accounts in the policy process.

9. The working group on introduction of social dimensions will coordinate and prepare an issue paper on how a limited number of social variables could be included in SEEA to contribute to the analyses on sustainable development.

10. In terms of the promotion of the application of SEEA (the third strategic direction), the London Group stressed the importance of maintaining links between data producers and users. Environmental accounts have now reached a level of methodological development that justifies their entry into the mainstream. In particular, the accounts should be better integrated with existing environmental data-collection and indicator activities and could be used more frequently in the policy process. The London Group will seek opportunities to promote these objectives at the national and international levels.

III. Organization of the London Group

11. The London Group was established in 1994 by the Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom, Statistics Canada and the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat). It met for the first time in London (hence its name). During the London Group's initial period, the founding agencies and host countries provided coordination and planning of meetings (proceedings, agenda, communications, etc.). In 1997, a secretariat was established at Statistics Canada following a meeting held in Ottawa.

12. When the London Group took on the challenge of SEEA revision, additional coordination was required, which resulted in the involvement of the international agencies that would eventually publish the handbook (Eurostat, IMF, OECD, World Bank and the United Nations Statistics Division) in a formal coordinating committee for the London Group established in 1999. The committee also comprised Statistics Canada (as secretariat) and the previous and future host organizations to ensure continuity.

13. With the completion of SEEA-2003, the need for coordination is less urgent. At the meeting in Rome, it was agreed that a smaller coordinating committee would be retained, comprising Statistics Canada (as secretariat), the future host organization and the United Nations Statistics Division. The committee is open to other member organizations as well if they wish to participate.

14. The role of the coordinating committee is to:

(a) Coordinate the activities of the London Group, including the organization of its meetings and preparation of its proceedings;

(b) Identify priority areas of work, in consultation with the members of the London Group;

(c) Facilitate the creation and functioning of working groups on selected practical or theoretical topics;

(d) Assist in the coordinating of environmental accounting activities at the international level by maintaining communication with the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts and the Inter-Agency Working Group on Environment Statistics;

(e) Promote the use of SEEA-2003 and environmental-economic accounts in general as a framework for data collection and indicators and for policy uses.

15. The London Group web site (http://www4.statcan.ca/citygrp/london/london.htm), maintained by its secretariat, played an important role during the revision of SEEA by ensuring that the international community was informed of the developments in the revision process and providing opportunities for commenting on draft chapters. At the most recent meeting in Rome, it was agreed that the web site will continue to serve as the main tool for the London Group to communicate with other organizations with an interest in environmental accounting.

Participation in the London Group

16. The London Group is open to the participation of countries that are active in environmental accounting. Until 1997, its meetings were attended mostly by developed countries. During the SEEA revision process, developing countries with experience on environmental accounting were invited to attend the meeting with the financial assistance of the United Nations Statistics Division.

17. The practice of having a range of countries with various environmental concerns is considered useful and the group has encouraged the United Nations Statistics Division to continue funding the participation of developing countries.

18. In order to maintain its focus the London Group agrees that participation in its meetings will be limited to statistical offices and international agencies with active, well-developed programmes of environmental accounting. Experts on specific topics will be invited on an ad hoc basis.

Frequency of meetings

19. The London Group has agreed to continue meeting on a yearly basis. The next meeting will be hosted by Statistics Denmark and is tentatively scheduled for September 2004 in Copenhagen. The newly established working groups may decide to meet on an ad hoc basis, when necessary, to facilitate their work.

IV. Points for discussion

20. The Commission may wish to review the London Group's work plan and the organization of its work.